

# How the War Came to America



ISSUED BY  
THE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC INFORMATION  
THE SECRETARY OF STATE  
THE SECRETARY OF WAR  
THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY  
GEORGE CREEL

*June 15, 1917*

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### EXECUTIVE ORDER.

I hereby create a Committee on Public Information, to be composed of the Secretary of State, the Secretary of War, the Secretary of the Navy, and a civilian who shall be charged with the executive direction of the committee.

As civilian chairman of the committee I appoint Mr. George Creel.

The Secretary of State, the Secretary of War, and the Secretary of the Navy are authorized each to detail an officer or officers to the work of the committee.

WOODROW WILSON.

APRIL 14, 1917.



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IN THE years when this Republic was still struggling for existence, in the face of threatened encroachments by hostile monarchies over the sea, in order to make the New World safe for democracy our forefathers established here the policy that soon came to be known as the Monroe doctrine. Warning the Old World not to interfere in the political life of the New, our Government pledged itself in return to abstain from interference in the political conflicts of Europe; and history has vindicated the wisdom of this course. We were then too weak to influence the destinies of Europe, and it was vital to mankind that this first great experiment in government of and by the people should not be disturbed by foreign attack.

Reenforced by the experience of our expanding national life, this doctrine has been ever since the dominating element in the growth of our foreign policy. Whether or not we could have maintained it in case of concerted attack from abroad, it has seemed of such importance to us that we were at all times ready to go to war in its defense. And though since it was first enunciated our strength has grown by leaps and bounds, although in that time the vast increase of our foreign trade and of travel abroad, modern transport, modern mails, the cables and the wireless, have brought us close to Europe and have made our isolation more and more imaginary, there has been, until the outbreak of the present conflict, small desire on our part to abrogate or even amend the old familiar tradition which has for so long given us peace.

In both conferences at The Hague, in 1899 and 1907, we reaffirmed this policy. As our delegates signed the first convention in regard to arbitration, they read into the minutes this statement:

“Nothing contained in this convention shall be so construed as to require the United States of America to depart from its traditional policy of not intruding upon, interfering with, or entangling itself in the political questions or policy or internal



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administration of any foreign State; nor shall anything contained in the said convention be construed to imply a relinquishment by the United States of America of its traditional attitude toward purely American questions."

At The Hague we pledged ourselves, in case we ever went to war, to observe certain broad general rules of decency and fair fighting. But at the same time we cleared ourselves from any responsibility for forcing other nations to observe similar pledges. And in 1906, when our delegates took part in the Algeciras Conference, which was to regulate the affairs of the distracted Kingdom of Morocco, they followed the same formula there. While acquiescing in the new régime which guaranteed the independence and integrity of Morocco, we explicitly announced that we assumed no police responsibility for the enforcement of the treaty. And if any honest doubt was left as to our attitude in regard to the enforcement of Old World agreements, it was dispelled five years later, when our Government refused to protest against the overthrow of the *Acte d'Algeciras*.

We declined to be drawn into quarrels abroad which might endanger in any way our traditional policy.

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Our second great tradition in international relations has been our persistent effort to secure a stable and equitable agreement of the nations upon such a maritime code as would assure to all the world a just freedom of the seas.

This effort was born of our vital need. For although it was possible for the Republic to keep aloof from the nineteenth century disputes that rent the Continent of Europe, we could not be indifferent to the way in which war was conducted at sea. In those early years of our national life, when we were still but a few communities ranged along the Atlantic coast, we were a seafaring people. At a time when our frontiersmen had not yet reached the Mississippi, the fame of our daring clipper ships had spread to all the Seven Seas. So while we could watch the triumphant march and the tragic counter-march of Napoleon's grand army with detached indifference, his Continental Blockade and the British Orders in Council at once affected the lives of our citizens intimately and disastrously.



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So it was in the case of the Barbary pirates. We had no interest in the land quarrels and civil wars of the Barbary States, but we fought them for obstructing the freedom of the seas.

And in the decades ever since, although the imagination of our people has been engrossed in the immense labor of winning the West, our Department of State has never lost sight of the compelling interest that we have upon the seas, and has constantly striven to gain the assent of all nations to a maritime code which should be framed and enforced by a joint responsibility. Various watchwords have arisen in this long controversy. We have urged the inviolability of private property at sea, we have asked for a liberal free list and a narrow definition of contraband. But our main insistence has not been on any such details. One salient idea has guided our diplomacy. The law of the sea must be founded not on might but on right and a common accord, upon a code binding all alike, which can not be changed or set aside by the will of any one nation. Our ideal has been not a weakening but a strengthening of legal restraint by the free will and agreement of all. We have asked nothing for ourselves that we do not ask for the whole world. The seas will never be free, in our American meaning, until all who sail thereon have had a voice in framing sea laws. The just governance of the seas must rest on the consent of the governed.

No other question of international polity has found the great powers more divided. But in our insistence on this fundamental principle, we have been strengthened by the support of many other countries. At times we have had the support of Great Britain. No one of our Secretaries of State has more clearly defined our ideal than has Viscount Grey, recently British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. None of our statesmen has ever gone so far as he in advocating limitation of the rights of belligerents on the sea. It was on his initiative that the international naval conference was summoned to London in 1909, and it was under his guidance that the eminent international lawyers and diplomats and admirals who gathered there drew up the Declaration of London.

While there were in that Declaration sections that did not quite meet our approval and that we should have liked to



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amend, the document was from our point of view a tremendous step in advance. For although, like any effort to concisely formulate the broad principles of equity, it did not wholly succeed in its purpose, it was at least an honest attempt to arrive at an agreement on a complete international code of sea law, based upon mutual consent and not to be altered by any belligerent in the heat of the conflict.

But the Declaration of London was not ratified by the British Parliament, for the point of view prevailing then in England was that a power dependent almost wholly upon its navy for protection could not safely accept further limitations upon action at sea unless there were compensating limitations on land powers. And this latter concession Germany consistently refused to make. The conference therefore came to naught. And the London Declaration having been rejected by the strongest maritime power, its indorsement was postponed by all the other countries involved. Our motives, however, remained unchanged; and our Government persisted in its purpose to secure a general ratification either of this declaration or of some similar maritime code.

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There has been in our diplomacy one more outstanding aspiration. We have constantly sought to substitute juridical for military settlement of disputes between nations.

The genesis of this idea dates from the discussions over the Federal organization of our 13 original States, which were almost as jealous of their sovereignties as are the nations of Europe to-day. The first great step toward the League of Honor, which we hope will at last bring peace to the world, was taken when our 13 States agreed to disarm and submit all their disputes to the high tribunal of the new federation.

And this idea of an interstate court, which except at the time of our Civil War has given this Nation internal peace, has profoundly influenced our foreign policy. Of our efforts to bring others to our way of thinking, an historical résumé was presented by our delegates at the First Hague Conference. A project was submitted there for the formation of a world court. And a few years later Mr. Root, our Secretary of State, in



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instructing our delegates to the Second Conference at The Hague, laid especial emphasis on this same international ideal.

We have taken a particular pride in being in the vanguard of this movement for the peaceable settlement by process of law of all disputes between nations. And these efforts have not been without success. For although the last few decades have seen this principle time and again put under a terrific strain, no nation has dared to go to war against the award of a court of arbitration. The stupendous possibilities that lie in arbitration for solving international problems, promoting liberal principles, and safeguarding human life had been amply demonstrated before the present war began.

But in the discussions at The Hague, largely through the resistance of the German Empire and its satellites, the efforts of our delegates and those of other Governments to bring about a general treaty of compulsory arbitration had failed. And therefore this nation, having been thwarted in its attempt to secure a general agreement, began negotiations with all those nations which like our own preferred the methods of law and peace, with the purpose of effecting dual arbitration treaties. And before the end of 1914 we had signed far-reaching treaties with 30 nations, 20 of which had been duly ratified and proclaimed. But in this work, too, we were made to feel the same opposition as at The Hague. For while Great Britain, France, Russia, and Italy cordially welcomed our overtures, the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires were noticeably absent from the list of those nations who desired by specific agreements in advance to minimize the danger of war.

On the eve of the present conflict, our position toward other nations might have been summarized under three heads:

**I. The Monroe doctrine.**—We had pledged ourselves to defend the New World from European aggression, and we had by word and deed made it clear that we would not intervene in any European dispute.

**II. The freedom of the seas.**—In every naval conference our influence had been given in support of the principle that sea law to be just and worthy of general respect must be based on the consent of the governed.

**III. Arbitration.**—As we had secured peace at home by referring interstate disputes to a federal tribunal, we urged a



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similar settlement of international controversies. Our ideal was a permanent world court. We had already signed arbitration treaties not only with great powers which might conceivably attack us, but even more freely with weaker neighbors in order to show our good faith in recognizing the equality of all nations both great and small. We had made plain to the nations our purpose to forestall by every means in our power the recurrence of wars in the world.

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The outbreak of war in 1914 caught this Nation by surprise. The peoples of Europe had had at least some warnings of the coming storm, but to us such a blind, savage onslaught on the ideals of civilization had appeared impossible.

The war was incomprehensible. Either side was championed here by millions living among us who were of European birth. Their contradictory accusations threw our thoughts into disarray, and in the first chaotic days we could see no clear issue that affected our national policy. There was no direct assault on our rights. It seemed at first to most of us a purely European dispute, and our minds were not prepared to take sides in such a conflict. The President's proclamation of neutrality was received by us as natural and inevitable. It was quickly followed by his appeal to "the citizens of the Republic."

"Every man who really loves America will act and speak in the true spirit of neutrality," he said, "which is the spirit of impartiality and fairness and friendliness to all concerned. \* \* \* It will be easy to excite passion and difficult to allay it." He expressed the fear that our Nation might become divided in camps of hostile opinion. "Such divisions among us \* \* \* might seriously stand in the way of the proper performance of our duty as the one great nation at peace, the one people holding itself ready to play a part of impartial mediation and speak counsels of peace and accommodation, not as a partisan, but as a friend."

This purpose—the preservation of a strict neutrality in order that later we might be of use in the great task of mediation—dominated all the President's early speeches.



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"We are the mediating Nation of the world," he declared in an address on April 20, 1915. "We are compounded of the nations of the world; we mediate their blood, we mediate their traditions, we mediate their sentiments, their tastes, their passions; we are ourselves compounded of those things. We are, therefore, able to understand them in the compound, not separately as partisans, but unitedly as knowing and comprehending and embodying them all. It is in that sense that I mean that America is a mediating Nation."

American neutrality, in those first months of the great war, was beyond any question real.

But the spirit of neutrality was not easy to maintain. Public opinion was deeply stirred by the German invasion of Belgium and by reports of atrocities there. The Royal Belgian Commission, which came in September, 1914, to lay their country's cause for complaint before our National Government, was received with sympathy and respect. The President in his reply reserved our decision in the affair. It was the only course he could take without an abrupt departure from our most treasured traditions of noninterference in Old World disputes. But the sympathy of America went out to the Belgians in their heroic tragedy, and from every section of our land money contributions and supplies of food and clothing poured over to the Commission for Relief in Belgium, which was under the able management of our fellow countrymen abroad.

Still, the thought of taking an active part in this European war was very far from most of our minds. The Nation shared with the President the belief that by maintaining a strict neutrality we could best serve Europe at the end as impartial mediators.

But in the very first days of the war our Government foresaw that complications on the seas might put us in grave risk of being drawn into the conflict. No neutral nation could foretell what violations of its vital interests at sea might be attempted by the belligerents. And so, on August 6, 1914, our Secretary of State dispatched an identical note to all the powers then at war, calling attention to the risk of serious trouble arising out of this uncertainty of neutrals as to their maritime rights and proposing that the Declaration of London be accepted by all nations for the duration of the war.



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But the British Government's response, while expressing sympathy with the purpose of our suggestion and declaring their "keen desire to consult so far as possible the interests of neutral countries," announced their decision "to adopt generally the rules of the Declaration in question, subject to certain modifications and additions which they judge indispensable to the efficient conduct of their naval operations." The Declaration had not been indorsed by any power in time of peace, and there was no legal obligation on Great Britain to accept it. Her reply, however, was disappointing, for it did nothing to clarify the situation. Great Britain recognized as binding certain long accepted principles of international law and sought now to apply them to the peculiar and unforeseen conditions of this war. But these principles were often vague and therefore full of dangerous possibilities of friction.

Controversies soon arose between Great Britain and this Nation. In practice their ruling sometimes seemed to our Government inconsistent with the spirit of international law, and especially with the established precedents which they invoked. But painful as this divergence of opinion sometimes was, it did not seriously threaten our position of neutrality, for the issues that arose involved only rights of property and were amply covered by the arbitration treaty signed only a short time before by Great Britain and the United States.

And this controversy led to a clearer understanding on our part of the British attitude toward our ideal of the freedom of the seas. They were not willing to accept our classification of the seas as being distinct from the Old World. We had confined our interest to matters affecting rights at sea and had kept carefully aloof from issues affecting the interests of European nations on land. The British were interested in both. They explained that they had participated in the London naval conference in the hope that it would lead to a sound and liberal entente in the interest of the rights of all nations on the sea and on the land as well, and that they had refused to ratify the London Declaration because no compensating accord on the Continent had resulted. They could not afford to decrease the striking power of their navy unless their powerful neighbors on land agreed to decrease their armies.



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That this attitude of England deeply impressed our Government is shown by the increasing attention given by the United States to the search for ways and means of insuring at the end of the war, a lasting peace for all the world. The address of our President, on May 27, 1916, before the League to Enforce Peace was a milestone in our history. He outlined the main principles on which a stable peace must rest, principles plainly indicating that this Nation would have to give up its position of isolation and assume the responsibilities of a world power. The President said:

“So sincerely do we believe these things that I am sure that I speak the mind and wish of the people of America when I say that the United States is willing to become a partner in any feasible association of nations formed in order to realize these objects and make them secure against violation.”

It was a new and significant note in our foreign policy. But the mind of America had learned much in the long bitter months of war. Future historians will make charts of this remarkable evolution in our public opinion: the gradual abandonment of the illusion of isolation; the slow growth of a realization that we could not win freedom on sea—for us a vital interest—unless we consented to do our share in maintaining freedom on land as well, and that we could not have peace in the world—the peace we loved and needed for the perfection of our democracy—unless we were willing and prepared to help to restrain any nation that willfully endangered the peace of the whole world family.

Had this address of the President come before the war, there would have arisen a storm of protest from all sections of the land. But in May, 1916, the Nation's response was emphatic approval.

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In the meantime, although our neutral rights were not brought into question by Germany as early as by England, the German controversy was infinitely more serious.

For any dissensions that might arise, no arbitration treaty existed between the United States and the German Government. This was from no fault of ours. We had tried to establish with Germany the same treaty relations we had with Great



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Britain and 19 other nations. But these overtures had been rejected. And this action on the part of the Imperial German Government was only one example of its whole system of diplomacy. In both conferences at The Hague it had been the German delegates who were the most active in blocking all projects for the pacific settlement of disputes between nations. They had preferred to limit international relations to the old modes of diplomacy and war. It was therefore obvious from the first that any controversy with the German Government would be exceedingly serious; for if it could not be solved by direct diplomatic conversations, there was no recourse except to war.

From such conversations there is small hope of satisfactory results unless the good faith of both sides is profound. If either side lacks good faith, or reveals in all its actions an insidious hostility, diplomacy is of no avail. And so it has proved in the present case.

In the first year of the war the Government of Germany stirred up among its people a feeling of resentment against the United States on account of our insistence upon our right as a neutral nation to trade in munitions with the belligerent powers. Our legal right in the matter was not seriously questioned by Germany. She could not have done so consistently, for as recently as the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913 both Germany and Austria sold munitions to the belligerents. Their appeals to us in the present war were not to observe international law, but to revise it in their interest. And these appeals they tried to make on moral and humanitarian grounds. But upon "the moral issue" involved, the stand taken by the United States was consistent with its traditional policy and with obvious common sense. For if, with all other neutrals, we refused to sell munitions to belligerents, we could never in time of a war of our own obtain munitions from neutrals, and the nation which had accumulated the largest reserves of war supplies in time of peace would be assured of victory. The militarist state that invested its money in arsenals would be at a fatal advantage over the free people who invested their wealth in schools. To write into international law that neutrals should not trade in munitions would be to hand over the world to the



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rule of the nation with the largest armament factories. Such a policy the United States of America could not accept.

But our principal controversy with the German Government, and the one which rendered the situation at once acute, rose out of their announcement of a sea zone where their submarines would operate in violation of all accepted principles of international law. Our indignation at such a threat was soon rendered passionate by the sinking of the *Lusitania*. This attack upon our rights was not only grossly illegal; it defied the fundamental concepts of humanity. Aggravating restraints on our trade were grievances which could be settled by litigation after the war, but the wanton murder of peaceable men and of innocent women and children, citizens of a nation with which Germany was at peace, was a crime against the civilized world which could never be settled in any court.

Our Government, however, inspired still by a desire to preserve peace if possible, used every resource of diplomacy to force the German Government to abandon such attacks. This diplomatic correspondence, which has already been published, proves beyond doubt that our Government sought by every honorable means to preserve faith in that mutual sincerity between nations which is the only basis of sound diplomatic interchange.

But evidence of the bad faith of the Imperial German Government soon piled up on every hand. Honest efforts on our part to establish a firm basis of good neighborliness with the German people were met by their Government with quibbles, misrepresentations, and counter accusations against their enemies abroad. And meanwhile in this country official agents of the Central Powers—protected from criminal prosecution by diplomatic immunity—conspired against our internal peace, placed spies and agents provocateurs throughout the length and breadth of our land, and even in high positions of trust in departments of our Government. While expressing a cordial friendship for the people of the United States, the Government of Germany had its agents at work both in Latin America and Japan. They bought or subsidized papers and supported speakers there to rouse feelings of bitterness and distrust against us in those friendly nations, in order to embroil us in war. They were inciting to insurrection in Cuba, in Haiti, and in Santo Domingo; their hostile hand was stretched out to



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take the Danish Islands; and everywhere in South America they were abroad sowing the seeds of dissension, trying to stir up one nation against another and all against the United States. In their sum these various operations amounted to direct assault upon the Monroe doctrine. And even if we had given up our right to travel on the sea, even if we had surrendered to German threats and abandoned our legitimate trade in munitions, the German offensive in the New World, in our own land and among our neighbors, was becoming too serious to be ignored.

So long as it was possible, the Government of the United States tried to believe that such activities, the evidence of which was already in a large measure at hand, were the work of irresponsible and misguided individuals. It was only reluctantly, in the face of overwhelming proof, that the recall of the Austro-Hungarian ambassador and of the German military and naval attachés was demanded. Proof of their criminal violations of our hospitality was presented to their Governments. But these Governments in reply offered no apologies nor did they issue reprimands. It became clear that such intrigue was their settled policy.

In the meantime the attacks of the German submarines upon the lives and property of American citizens had gone on; the protests of our Government were now sharp and ominous; and this Nation was rapidly being drawn into a state of war. As the President said in Topeka, on February 2, 1916:

“We are not going to invade any nation’s right. But suppose, my fellow countrymen, some nation should invade our rights. What then? \* \* \* I have come here to tell you that the difficulties of our foreign policy \* \* \* daily increase in number and intricacy and in danger, and I would be derelict to my duty to you if I did not deal with you in these matters with the utmost candor, and tell you what it may be necessary to use the force of the United States to do.” The next day at St. Louis, he repeated his warning: “The danger is not from within, gentlemen, it is from without; and I am bound to tell you that that danger is constant and immediate, not because anything new has happened, not because there has been any change in our international relationships within recent weeks or months, but because the danger comes with every turn of events.”



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The break would have come sooner if our Government had not been restrained by the hope that saner counsels might still prevail in Germany. For it was well known to us that the German people had to a very large extent been kept in ignorance of many of the secret crimes of their Government against us. And the pressure of a faction of German public opinion less hostile to this country was shown when their Government acquiesced to some degree in our demands, at the time of the *Sussex* outrage, and for nearly a year maintained at least a pretense of observing the pledge they had made to us. The tension was abated.

While the war spirit was growing in some sections of our Nation, there was still no widespread desire to take part in the conflict abroad; for the tradition of noninterference in Europe's political affairs was too deeply rooted in our national life to be easily overthrown. Moreover, two other considerations strengthened our Government in its efforts to remain neutral in this war. The first was our traditional sense of responsibility toward all the republics of the New World. Throughout the crisis our Government was in constant communication with the countries of Central and South America. They, too, preferred the ways of peace. And there was a very obvious obligation upon us to safeguard their interests with our own. The second consideration, which had been so often developed in the President's speeches, was the hope that by keeping aloof from the bitter passions abroad, by preserving untroubled here the holy ideals of civilized intercourse between nations, we might be free at the end of this war to bind up the wounds of the conflict, to be the restorers and rebuilders of the wrecked structure of the world.

All these motives held us back, but it was not long until we were beset by further complications. We soon had reason to believe that the recent compliance of the German Government had not been made to us in good faith, and was only temporary; and by the end of 1916 it was plain that our neutral status had again been made unsafe through the ever-increasing aggressiveness of the German autocracy. There was general agreement here with the statement of our President, on October 26, 1916, that this conflict was the last great war involving the world in which we could remain neutral.



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It was in this frame of mind, fearing we might be drawn into the war if it did not soon come to an end, that the President began the preparation of his note, asking the belligerent powers to define their war aims. But before he had completed it, the world was surprised by the peace move of the German Government—an identical note on behalf of the German Empire, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey, sent through neutral powers on December 12, 1916, to the governments of the Allies, proposing negotiations for peace. While expressing the wish to end this war—"a catastrophe which thousands of years of common civilization was unable to prevent and which injures the most precious achievements of humanity"—the greater portion of the note was couched in terms that gave small hope of a lasting peace. Boasting of German conquests, "the glorious deeds of our armies," the note implanted in neutral minds the belief that it was the purpose of the Imperial German Government to insist upon such conditions as would leave all Central Europe under German dominance and so build up an Empire which would menace the whole liberal world.

Moreover, the German proposal was accompanied by a thinly veiled threat to all neutral nations; and from a thousand sources, official and unofficial, the word came to Washington that unless the neutrals used their influence to bring the war to an end on terms dictated from Berlin, Germany and her allies would consider themselves henceforth free from any obligations to respect the rights of neutrals. The Kaiser ordered the neutrals to exert pressure on the Entente to bring the war to an abrupt end, or to beware of the consequences. Clear warnings were brought to our Government that if the German peace move should not be successful, the submarines would be unleashed for a more intense and ruthless war upon all commerce.

On the 18th of December, the President dispatched his note to all the belligerent powers, asking them to define their war aims. There was still hope in our minds that the mutual suspicions between the warring powers might be decreased, and the menace of future German aggression and dominance be removed, by finding a guaranty of good faith in a League of Nations. There was a chance that by the creation of such a league as part of the peace negotiations, the war could now be



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brought to an end before our Nation was involved. Two statements issued to the press by our Secretary of State, upon the day the note was dispatched, threw a clear light on the seriousness with which our Government viewed the crisis.

From this point, events moved rapidly. The powers of the Entente replied to the German peace note. Neutral nations took action on the note of the President, and from both belligerents replies to this note were soon in our hands.

The German reply was evasive—in accord with their traditional preference for diplomacy behind closed doors. Refusing to state to the world their terms, Germany and her allies merely proposed a conference. They adjourned all discussion of any plan for a league of peace until after hostilities should end.

The response of the Entente Powers was frank and in harmony with our principal purpose. Many questions raised in the statement of their aims were so purely European in character as to have small interest for us; but our great concern in Europe was the lasting restoration of peace, and it was clear that this was also the chief interest of the Entente Nations. As to the wisdom of some of the measures they proposed toward this end, we might differ in opinion, but the trend of their proposals was the establishment of just frontiers based on the rights of all nations, the small as well as the great, to decide their own destinies.

The aims of the belligerents were now becoming clear. From the outbreak of hostilities the German Government had claimed that it was fighting a war of defense. But the tone of its recent proposals had been that of a conqueror. It sought a peace based on victory. The central empires aspired to extend their domination over other races. They were willing to make liberal terms to any one of their enemies, in a separate peace which would free their hands to crush other opponents. But they were not willing to accept any peace which did not, all fronts considered, leave them victors and the dominating imperial power of Europe. The war aims of the Entente showed a determination to thwart this ambition of the Imperial German Government. Against the German Peace to further German growth and aggression the Entente Powers offered a plan for a European Peace that should make the whole continent secure.

At this juncture the President read his address to the Senate, on January 22, 1917, in which he outlined the kind of peace the



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United States of America could join in guaranteeing. His words were addressed not only to the Senate and this Nation but to people of all countries.

"May I not add that I hope and believe that I am in effect speaking for liberals and friends of humanity in every nation and of every program of liberty? I would fain believe that I am speaking for the silent mass of mankind everywhere who have as yet had no place or opportunity to speak their real hearts out concerning the death and ruin they see to have come already upon the persons and the homes they hold most dear."

The address was a rebuke to those who still cherished dreams of a world dominated by one nation. For the peace he outlined was not that of a victorious emperor, it was not the peace of Caesar. It was in behalf of all the world, and it was a Peace of the People.

"No peace can last, or ought to last, which does not recognize and accept the principle that governments derive all their just powers from the consent of the governed, and that no right anywhere exists to hand people about from sovereignty to sovereignty as if they were property."

"I am proposing, as it were, that the nations should with one accord adopt the doctrine of President Monroe as the doctrine of the world; that no nation should seek to extend its policy over any other nation or people, but that every people should be left free to determine its own polity, its own way of development, unhindered, unthreatened, unafeard, the little along with the great and powerful."

"I am proposing that all nations henceforth avoid entangling alliances which would draw them into competitions of power, catch them in a net of intrigue and selfish rivalry, and disturb their own affairs with influences intruded from without. There is no entangling alliance in a concert of power. When all unite to act in the same sense and with the same purpose, all act in the common interest and are free to live their own lives under a common protection."

"I am proposing government by the consent of the governed; that freedom of the seas which in international conference after conference representatives of the United States have urged with



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the eloquence of those who are the convinced disciples of liberty; and that moderation of armaments which makes of armies and navies a power for order merely, not an instrument of aggression or of selfish violence."

"And the paths of the sea must, alike in law and in fact, be free. The freedom of the seas is the sine qua non of peace, equality, and cooperation."

"It is a problem closely connected with the limitation of naval armament and the cooperation of the navies of the world in keeping the seas at once free and safe. And the question of limiting naval armaments opens the wider and perhaps more difficult question of the limitation of armies and of all programs of military preparation. \* \* \* There can be no sense of safety and equality among the nations if great preponderating armaments are henceforth to continue here and there to be built up and maintained."

"Mere agreements may not make peace secure. It will be absolutely necessary that a force be created as a guarantor of the permanency of the settlement so much greater than the force of any nation now engaged or any alliance hitherto formed or projected that no nation, no probable combination of nations, could face or withstand it. If the peace presently to be made is to endure, it must be a peace made secure by the organized major force of mankind."

If there were any doubt in our minds as to which of the great alliances was the more in sympathy with these ideals, it was removed by the popular response abroad to this address of the President. For while exception was taken to some parts of it in Britain and France, it was plain that so far as the peoples of the Entente were concerned the President had been amply justified in stating that he spoke for all forward looking, liberal-minded men and women. It was not so in Germany. The people there who could be reached, and whose hearts were stirred by this enunciation of the principles of a people's peace, were too few or too oppressed to make their voices heard in the councils of their nation. Already, on January 16, 1917, unknown to the people of Germany, Herr Zimmerman, their Secretary of Foreign Affairs, had secretly dispatched a note to their minister in Mexico, informing him of the German intention



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to repudiate the *Sussex* pledge and instructing him to offer to the Mexican Government New Mexico and Arizona if Mexico would join with Japan in attacking the United States.

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In the new year of 1917, as through our acceptance of world responsibilities so plainly indicated in the President's utterances in regard to a league of nations, we felt ourselves now drawing nearer to a full accord with the powers of the entente; and as on the other hand we found ourselves more and more outraged at the German Government's methods of conducting warfare and their brutal treatment of people in their conquered lands; as we more and more uncovered their hostile intrigues against the peace of the New World; and above all, as the sinister and antidemocratic ideals of their ruling class became manifest in their manœuvres for a peace of conquest—the Imperial German Government abruptly threw aside the mask.

On the last day of January, 1917, Count Bernstorff handed to Mr. Lansing a note in which his Government announced its purpose to intensify and render more ruthless the operations of their submarines at sea, in a manner against which our Government had protested from the beginning. The German Chancellor also stated before the Imperial Diet that the reason this ruthless policy had not been earlier employed was simply because the Imperial Government had not then been ready to act. In brief, under the guise of friendship and the cloak of false promises, it had been preparing this attack.

This was the direct challenge. There was no possible answer except to hand their ambassador his passports and so have done with a diplomatic correspondence which had been vitiated from the start by the often proved bad faith of the Imperial Government.

On the same day, February 3, 1917, the President addressed both Houses of our Congress and announced the complete severance of our relations with Germany. The reluctance with which he took this step was evident in every word. But diplomacy had failed, and it would have been the hollowest pretense to maintain relations. At the same time, however, he made it plain that he did not regard this act as tantamount to a declaration of war. Here for the first time the President made his



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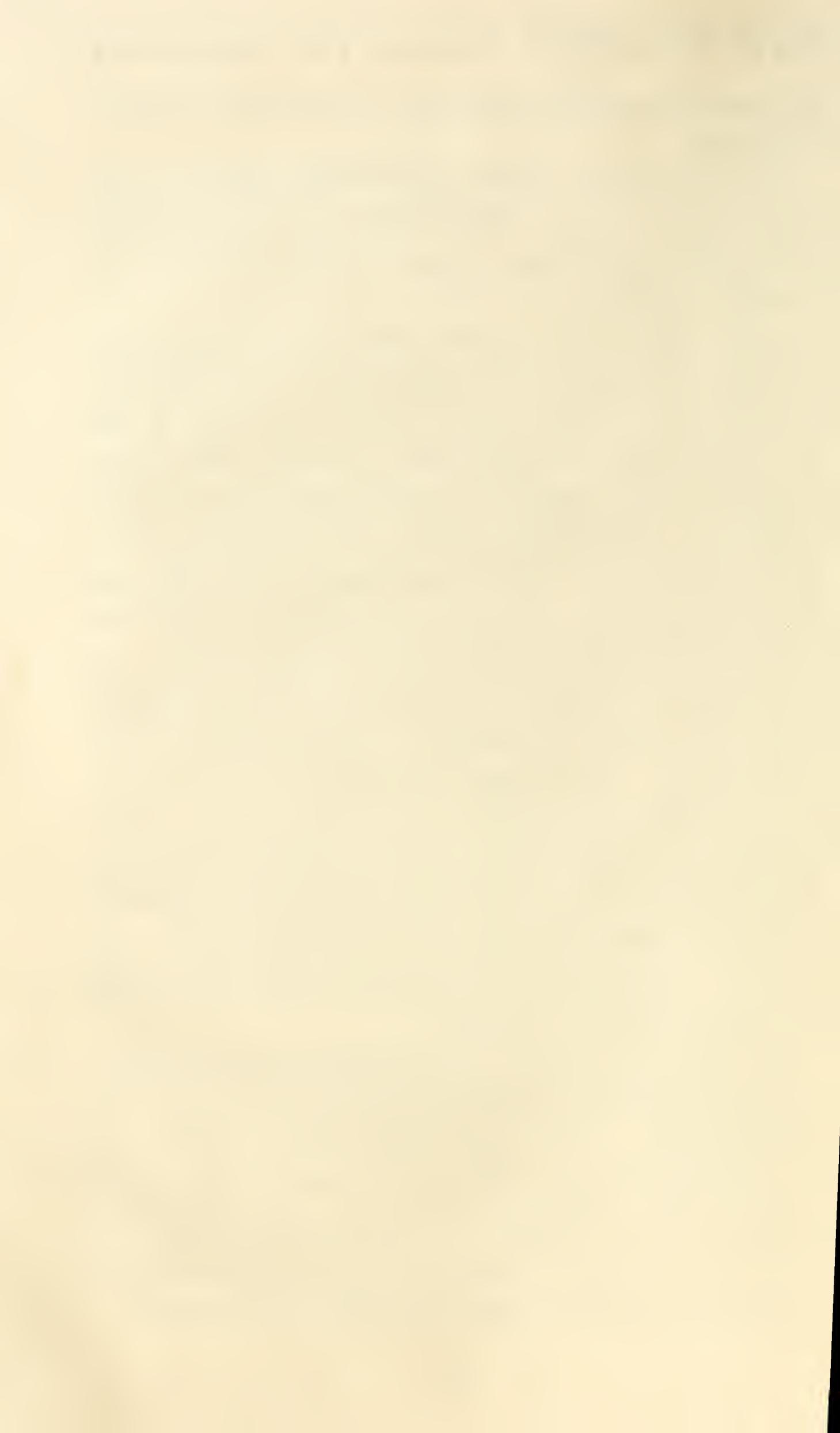
sharp distinction between government and people in undemocratic lands:

"We are the sincere friends of the German people," he said, "and earnestly desire to remain at peace with the Government which speaks for them. \* \* \* God grant we may not be challenged by acts of willful injustice on the part of the Government of Germany."

In this address of the President, and in its indorsement by the Senate, there was a solemn warning; for we still had hope that the German Government might hesitate to drive us to war. But it was soon evident that our warning had fallen on deaf ears. The tortuous ways and means of German official diplomacy were clearly shown in the negotiations opened by them through the Swiss legation on the 10th of February. In no word of their proposals did the German Government meet the real issue between us. And our State Department replied that no minor negotiations could be entertained until the main issue had been met by the withdrawal of the submarine order.

By the 1st of March it had become plain that the Imperial Government, unrestrained by the warning in the President's address to Congress on February 3, was determined to make good its threat. The President then again appeared before Congress to report the development of the crisis and to ask the approval of the Representatives of the Nation for the course of armed neutrality upon which, under his constitutional authority, he had now determined. More than 500 of the 531 members of the two Houses of Congress showed themselves ready and anxious to act; and the Armed Neutrality Declaration would have been accepted if it had not been for the legal death of the Sixty-fourth Congress on March 4.

No "overt" act, however, was ordered by our Government until Count Bernstorff had reached Berlin and Mr. Gerard was in Washington. For the German ambassador on his departure had begged that no irrevocable decision should be taken until he had had the chance to make one final plea for peace to his sovereign. We do not know the nature of his report to the Kaiser; we know only that, even if he kept his pledge and urged an eleventh-hour revocation of the submarine order, he was unable to sway the policy of the Imperial Government.



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And so, having exhausted every resource of patience, our Government on the 12th of March finally issued orders to place armed guards on our merchant ships.

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With the definite break in diplomatic relations there vanished the last vestige of cordiality toward the Government of Germany. Our attitude was now to change. So long as we had maintained a strict neutrality in the war, for the reason that circumstances might arise in which Europe would have need of an impartial mediator, for us to have given official heed to the accusations of either party would have been to prejudge the case before all the evidence was in. But now at last, with the breaking of friendly relations with the German Government, we were relieved of the oppressive duty of endeavoring to maintain a judicial detachment from the rights and wrongs involved in the war. We were no longer the outside observers striving to hold an even balance of judgment between disputants. One party by direct attack upon our rights and liberties was forcing us into the conflict. And, much as we had hoped to keep out of the fray, it was no little relief to be free at last from that reserve which is expected of a judge.

Much evidence had been presented to us of things so abhorrent to our ideas of humanity that they had seemed incredible, things we had been loath to believe, and with heavy hearts we had sought to reserve our judgment. But with the breaking of relations with the Government of Germany that duty at last was ended. The perfidy of that Government in its dealings with this Nation relieved us of the necessity of striving to give them the benefit of the doubt in regard to their crimes abroad. The Government which under cover of profuse professions of friendship had tried to embroil us in war with Mexico and Japan could not expect us to believe in its good faith in other matters. The men whose paid agents dynamited our factories here were capable of the infamies reported against them over the sea. Their Government's protestations, that their purpose was self-defense and the freeing of small nations, fell like a house of cards before the revelation of their "peace terms."



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And judging the German Government now in the light of our own experience through the long and patient years of our honest attempt to keep the peace, we could see the Great Autocracy and read her record through the war. And we found that record damnable. Beginning long before the war in Prussian opposition to every effort that was made by other nations and our own to do away with warfare, the story of the Autocracy has been one of vast preparations for war combined with an attitude of arrogant intolerance toward all other points of view, all other systems of government, all other hopes and dreams of men. With a fanatical faith in the destiny of German *kultur* as the system that must rule the world, the Imperial Government's actions have through years of boasting, double dealing, and deceit tended toward aggression upon the rights of others. And if there still be any doubt as to which nation began this war, there can be no uncertainty as to which one was most prepared, most exultant at the chance, and ready instantly to march upon other nations—even those who had given no offense. The wholesale depredations and hideous atrocities in Belgium and in Serbia were doubtless part and parcel with the Imperial Government's purpose to terrorize small nations into abject submission for generations to come. But in this the Autocracy has been blind. For its record in those countries, and in Poland and in northern France, has given not only to the Allies but to liberal peoples throughout the world the conviction that this menace to human liberties everywhere must be utterly shorn of its power for harm.

For the evil it has effected has ranged far out of Europe—out upon the open seas, where its submarines in defiance of law and the concepts of humanity have blown up neutral vessels and covered the waves with the dead and the dying, men and women and children alike. Its agents have conspired against the peace of neutral nations everywhere, sowing the seeds of dissension, ceaselessly endeavoring by tortuous methods of deceit, of bribery, false promises, and intimidation, to stir up brother nations one against the other, in order that the liberal world might not be able to unite, in order that the Autocracy might emerge triumphant from the war.

All this we know from our own experience with the Imperial Government. As they have dealt with Europe, so they have



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dealt with us and with all mankind. And so out of these years the conviction has grown that until the German Nation is divested of such rulers democracy cannot be safe.

There remained but one element to confuse the issue. One other great autocracy, the Government of the Russian Czar, had long been hostile to free institutions; it had been a stronghold of tyrannies reaching far back into the past; and its presence among the Allies had seemed to be in disaccord with the great liberal principles they were upholding in this war. Russia had been a source of doubt. Repeatedly during the conflict liberal Europe had been startled by the news of secret accord between the Kaiser and the Czar.

But now at this crucial time for our Nation, on the eve of our entrance into the war, the free men of all the world were thrilled and heartened by the news that the people of Russia had risen to throw off their Government and found a new democracy; and the torch of freedom in Russia lit up the last dark phases of the situation abroad. Here indeed was a fit partner for the League of Honor. The conviction was finally crystallized in American minds and hearts that this war across the sea was no mere conflict between dynasties but a stupendous civil war of all the world; a new campaign in the age-old war, the prize of which is liberty. Here at last was a struggle in which all who love freedom have a stake. Further neutrality on our part would have been a crime against our ancestors, who had given their lives that we might be free.

“The world must be made safe for democracy.”

On the 2d of April, 1917, the President read to the new Congress his message, in which he asked the Representatives of the Nation to declare the existence of a state of war, and in the early hours of the 6th of April the House by an overwhelming vote accepted the joint resolution which had already passed the Senate:

“Whereas the Imperial German Government has committed repeated acts of war against the Government and the people of the United States of America: Therefore be it

“Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the state of war between the United States and the Imperial German Government which has thus been thrust upon the United States



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is hereby formally declared; and that the President be, and he is hereby, authorized and directed to employ the entire naval and military forces of the United States and the resources of the Government to carry on war against the Imperial German Government; and to bring the conflict to a successful termination all the resources of the country are hereby pledged by the Congress of the United States."

Neutrality was a thing of the past. The time had come when the President's proud prophecy was fulfilled:

*"There will come that day when the world will say, 'This America that we thought was full of a multitude of contrary counsels now speaks with the great volume of the heart's accord, and that great heart of America has behind it the supreme moral force of righteousness and hope and the liberty of mankind.'"*

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